# STEPHEN B. ELKINS.

## How the Secretary of War Looks, Talks and Lives.

## A PLEASANT CONVERSATION

### From Which the Reader Can Form An Estimate of His Character--His Early Struggles and Rise in the World--His First Meeting With Gen. Schofield During the War--His Confidence in the Future of West Virginia--An Estimate of Blaine.

*Frank G. Carpenter in the New York Herald.*

Mr. Elkins has been so closely associated with Blaine that he has gotten to be known more as "Blaine's friend" than as Stephen B. Elkins. Let me tell you how he looks. He is one of the biggest men I have ever known. Standing over six feet in his stockings, his broad shoulders are well padded with muscular flesh, and his big arms make you think of those of Samson, and his legs are firm and strong. He is not fat, but his massive frame has no angles and he is the personification of energetic health. He has a great big round head which is fastened to his stout shoulders by a strong, well made neck. His clear blue eyes look out from under broad, open brows. He has a strong jaw, but there are pleasant lines about his mouth, and his short, strong, white teeth are often shown when he laughs. His hair is now white. It is cut short and you can see the rosy scalp showing through its frosted silver strands. Secretary Elkin's face is smooth shaven, and its mobility is shown in the changes of expression which pass over it as his thought turns from grave to gay as he talks.

His face impresses you with its cleanliness and his words are as clean as his skin. He never uses slang or profanity, and he once told me that he had never in all his life uttered a word which he would be ashamed to repeat in the presence of the purest woman he knew. There is nothing snobbish or sanctimonious, however, in his talk. He is perfectly frank and open. He is as outspoken as a boy, and he makes me think more than anything else of a good boy grown up.

HIS BOYHOOD.

Secretary Elkins was born in Ohio. His ancestors were Virginians, and his grandfather was a man of considerable wealth and a slaveholder. He sympathized, however, with President Jackson's emancipation scheme, and he moved to Ohio and bought a great lot of land in the southern part of the state. When Secretary Elkins was quite young his parents emigrated to Missouri and settled at Westport, near where Kansas City is now. Kansas City was then the river landing for Westport and the wagon trains and pack trains started out from there to cross the plains for Pike's Peak and California. Secretary Elkins says he can still see in his mind's eye the endless stream of white wagons which spotted the prairies, and he talks most interestingly of the stirring times of his life.

JOHN SHERMAN IN 1855.

"We were," said he, "on the very verge of what was then known as the Great American Desert, and the idea that the rich states of Kansas and Colorado would rise up west of us was not then thought of. I was brought up in the midst of political struggles. I remember John Brown and the Kansas trouble, and I was a boy when John Sherman came out west in 1855, on the Kansas Investigating Committee. The country was then full of border ruffians. Every one carried a pistol and Sherman himself walked about with a revolver in his pocket, and I am told he used to practice with it.

MEETING GENERAL SCHOFIELD.

"You were in the army during the war, Mr. Elkins?" said I.

"Yes," replied the secretary of war. "I was only a boy and had just gotten through school, but I was made the captain of a militia company and I served under General Tom Ewing. The fighting about the region of my home was in many respects as terrible as in any part of the Union. The soldiers of both North and South ravaged the country, and bushwhackers got their work in between whiles. Families were divided. My father and mother sympathized with the South, and my father and some of my brothers were in the Southern army. I don't know why I went with the North, but I had an intuition that the Union ought not to be destroyed, and though the pressure of my family was all for the South, I could not help it.

"An incident occurred during my service," continued Mr. Elkins, "that was rather curious in the light of my present position. It was my first meeting with General Schofield. He was at this time a major general and he had charge of the department of the Missouri, with his headquarters at St. Louis. He had come up to Westport to see General Ewing and consult with him. I shall never forget the impression he made upon me. We boys had never seen a major general before, and the morning he was to arrive we were ordered to put on our best uniforms and be on dress parade when he came. I remember him as he appeared then. He was surrounded by orderlies in gay uniforms and he dazzled our eyes with the gold lace, brass buttons and the fine clothes of a major general and his staff. General Schofield was then thirty-one years old, and he was full of fire and life. He was as straight as an arrow. His eyes were sharp and commanding, and as he sat there upon his horse among his soldiers he seemed to me the very incarnation of martial warfare. As I looked I thought, 'Well, this ends it! What fools the rebels are to think they can beat such soldiers as these! If they could only see our army they would throw up the struggle at once!'

"After looking at our troops General Schofield and General Ewing went into the best house of the town to hold a conference. We were dismissed, and as we broke ranks one of my lieutenants said to me:

"'Steve'—he called me captain when he was in the ranks, but Steve when off duty—'Steve,' said he, 'I wish we could see more of that great general. Can't we get in?'

"'I don't know,' said I, 'let's try,' and with that we pushed our way in and listened to the conference. I know I was greatly impressed by it and I thought to myself that this was the way history was made.

"Well," Mr. Elkins continued, "I did not see General Schofield to speak with him from that day until I met him here as secretary of war, when he came as general of the army to pay his respects to me as his superior officer."

HOW ELKINS WENT TO NEW MEXICO.

"How did you come to go to New Mexico, Mr. Secretary?" I asked.

"I left the army," replied Secretary Elkins, "about eight months before the close of the war. I could not get sent to the front with Grant or Sherman, as I wished, and I could not fight my friends at my own home, so I asked General Ewing to let me resign and he did so. I started west with the idea of going to Arizona. That territory had just been laid out and a governor and other officers had been appointed to take charge of it. Among these were Richard G. McCormick, the son-in-law of Senator Thurman, who was to be the secretary of the new territory. I was in New York with these men, and it was my intention to go around to California by the Isthmus of Panama, and from thence to work my way through to Arizona. We would have had to pay our passage in gold, and gold was then at a premium of 200, and there was danger that our ship would be captured by the rebel vessel under Admiral Semmes. In talking over the matter with Mr. McCormick I found they had decided to go west and cross the plains. They asked me to go with them and I did so. We went in wagons, and had two large trains with military escort to keep off the Indians. It took us three months to get to Albuquerque, and you cannot imagine the hardships of the trip. We traveled over that great American desert day after day, until our eyes were sore and our souls were sick with its bleakness and barrenness. Everything was dry, dusty and arid, and when I met some friends at Albuquerque who had come west, they persuaded me not to go further, but to join them and remain in New Mexico. So I told Mr. McCormick that I would not go to Arizona, and I traveled with my friends down to the town of Messilla, near El Paso, and there began the practice of law.

LAW PRACTICE AMONG THE MEXICANS.

"I had been studying Spanish," continued the secretary, "while we crossed the plains, and I found I could do nothing in New Mexico unless I could speak it. All the courts were in Spanish, the government proceedings of all kinds were in Spanish, and it was impossible to do anything without it. My first case I tried in broken Spanish, and I remember I got $10 for it. It took me about five minutes, and it was the first money I had ever made. I remember looking at it and thinking I had made it very easily and feeling very proud of it.

"I soon got plenty to do. My Spanish improved and I was made a candidate for the legislature, where all the proceedings were in Spanish. I first attempted to speak through an interpreter, but I did so poorly at it that I dismissed the interpreter and begged the pardon of the legislature for my broken Spanish and made my speeches as well as I could. I was well grounded in Greek and Latin. I knew the verbs thoroughly, and I soon found that I had mastered the language, and to-day I can speak Spanish fairly well. I was not anxious to be in the legislature nor had I any intention at this time of staying in New Mexico. My idea was that I would go back to St. Louis and practice law. The legislature was held at Santa Fe, and during my term there I had a little law practice and at the close of it I found th at I had saved $500.

"The lawyers of New Mexico then travelled in a circuit, going from one court to another and taking what practice came to them at the various county seats. I was asked by some of the lawyers to make the circuit with them at the close of my legislative term, and I did so. I found I had plenty to do and at some places I made very good fees. The result was that when I got back to Santa Fe I was $1,000 ahead. I went on with the lawyers through the circuit to Messilla and there had a good practice, and in a short time found to my surprise that my savings amounted to $10,000. Money was then bringing from twenty to thirty per cent a year, and when I found that this money would bring me in an income of from two to three thousand dollars a year and that it was so easily made, I saw this was better than I could possibly do in St. Louis, where I would have to probably starve for years before I made a competency, and I decided to stay."

WEST VIRGINIA'S FUTURE.

"You did not go back to New Mexico after leaving Congress?"

Of late years, however, I have been concentrating my energies in West Virginia, and Senator Davis and myself are doing all we can to develop that State and its resources. We believe it is one of the best States in the Union, and it has a coal area larger than Pennsylvania and larger than the combined coal areas of England, France and Germany. It has 16,000 square miles of coal lands. It has vast forests of the finest timber and its situation is the choicest of any State of the Union. It is within one hundred miles of the great lakes and within seventy-five miles of tidewater. The great Ohio River washes it on the west, and you can hardly go from the West to the East without passing through it. The State is being rapidly opened up and our property is becoming daily more and more valuable."

"I see, Mr. Elkins, you are the prospective governor for West Virginia?"

"No, I am not a candidate," replied Secretary Elkins. "My business arrangements are such that I could not very well remain at Charleston for four years, and though I would appreciate the honor of having the chance to be the first Republican governor of the southern states, I could not well be the candidate."

"Do you think West Virginia will be Republican in the next presidential election?"

"I think there is a fair fighting chance for it," was the reply.

"How about the general prospects?"

"I believe that President Harrison will be the candidate of the Republican party and that he will be elected. Our party is united on the finance and the tariff. The Democratic party is torn up on party issues and they cannot make a platform which will not be offensive to one section or the other. If they make free coinage their issue they will lose New York and the east, and if they do not they will lose their support in the west and to some extent also in the south."

"What are the prospects of the continuance of the Republican party?" I asked. "The mugwumps and third party men say that its days are numbered."

"The Republican party," said Mr. Elkins, "is in good political health and it will, I believe, always be one of the two great parties of the country. It is the party of agressive ideas, the party of progress, the party of action and work in this country. The Democratic party is a party of negation, of conservatism, of pulling back, of hypercriticism and anti-progress. When a great war is to be fought, when railroads are to be built across vast plains, when a great reciprocity policy is to be inaugurated or when anything that really affects the future of the country is to be done the Republican party has to be there to do it. The Democratic party stands back and criticises and if a failure or stagnation at any time occurs they make a little capital and have a temporary success out of their cry, "I told you so.'"

PURITY IN POLITICS.

"Mr. Elkins, you have for the past fifteen years been closely associated with the management of party politics. You have been on the national committee and have been one of the managers of presidential campaigns and you must know all about the inside workings of such things. I want to know whether there is much corruption in politics and whether we are not growing worse as we grow older?"

"I am not a politician," replied Mr. Elkins, "in the usual sense of the word, and I have only been connected with politics as the friend of the Republican party and as the friend of Mr. Blaine and of President Harrison. I have nothing to do with politics outside of the national campaign and as soon as these are over I go right back to business. I have, however, had a chance to see something of the inside workings of the political machinery of the United States and I think that party politics and party management grow purer and purer as the country grows older. Congress to-day is run on a higher plane than ever before and public opinion demands a higher political morality every year. I don't believe there is as much corruption in presidential campaigns as the people suppose. The buying of votes, which is sometimes charged, would, I think, be a very dangerous thing. The laws are such that the people would not dare to do it, and I don't think they want to as much as is charged. When I was connected with the management of the Blaine campaign in 1884 I said to Mr. B. F. Jones, who was chairman of the committee, that I did not want to go into the campaign without we could run it on a pure, honest and high toned basis, and we then and there agreed that we would allow no money for corruption of any sort. We demanded vouchers for everything that was spent and we could to-day show our books to the world without a blush."

"How about Blaine's letter of declination during the present canvass, Mr. Secretary?" I asked. "Does it take him out of the race for the nomination and is it sincere?"

"I think there is no doubt of its sincerity," was the reply, "and I do not think that Mr. Blaine will be a candidate."

ELKINS' ESTIMATE OF BLAINE.

"Can you give me an estimate of Blaine, Mr. Elkins?" said I. "Wherein consists his strength?"

"Mr. Blaine," replied Secretary Elkins, "is the most remarkable man I have ever known. He is a great big, broad genius, packed full of the most wonderful amount of knowledge upon the widest range of subjects, and possessing a wonderful capacity for receiving and absorbing information. He takes in facts and knowledge like a sponge does water, and he draws to him everything that is worth knowing which comes near him. He has the power of receptivity in a greater degree that anyone I have ever known. You may talk to him and the idea you wish to convey may not be developed in your own mind. You give him an inkling of it and he grasps it in all its possibilities and with his master mind brings from it products you did not dream of. He has a most wonderful memory. He forgets nothing, and his capacity for work is Herculean. Take his 'Twenty Years in Congress.' He wrote some of that book at the rate of eight pages a day. It was too much for any man to do, and I told him it would break him down if he kept it up, and I think he shows the strain of it to-day. I knew Mr. Blaine in his young days. What a man he was and what a moral courage he had! He was afraid to tackle nothing if he thought it was right, and how he fought for his convictions! He has, however, grown more conservative as he has grown older, and in proportion as responsibilities have been forced upon him he has become cautious, and I look upon him as one of the conservative public men of to-day. He is now at the maturity of his powers, and his chief aim is the success of his reciprocity scheme which he formulated when he was in President Garfield's cabinet, and which he has stuck to ever since."



Rev. John M. Small, of Wellington, Me., tips the scales at 315 pounds, and no one ever attempts to disturb his meetings. He is the best tax collector that the town has ever had.



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